

Story Suggestions

Even in dire circumstances, artisans persevere through craft

Budget crunched American consumers have a choice: They may not have control over the global economic crisis, but **they do have control** over how they spend their money. They can choose to not simply shop for a gift, but for humanity.

Now more than ever, people want to know where their money is going. Many are also re-evaluating their lives and in doing so, realizing that too much is at stake in the world to not want to help in some way. Consumers can make choices and help others buy how they spend.

At Aid to Artisans, an international, non-profit organization that through mentoring has helped create lasting economic opportunities for craftspeople in over 110 developing countries, your purchase of a handmade, authentic artisan product is far more than a stylish choice—you're helping artisans build lasting craft business that can pull their families out of poverty. In rural communities of developing countries, it is the craft industry that provides the second largest source of economic support after agriculture. Here is a glimpse of what life in developing countries is like for these artisans right now:

- The UN reported in late September, foreign direct investments in developing countries, which climbed by 21% in 2007, might fall by 10% worldwide this year.
- At the 6th summit conference of ACP countries (Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific), which are among the poorest in the world, leaders fear development aid will be the main victim of a crisis for which they have no responsibility at all.
- World Bank President Robert Zoellick says the financial crisis could have dire consequences in developing countries.

Yet even in these circumstances.....

Women artisans in South Africa who suffer from HIV and AIDS create beautiful Wola Nani papier mache bowls. Your purchase of these pieces helps these women earn fair wages that enable them to pay for medical expenses, food and other basic necessities.

In the middle ranges of the Central Himalayan region, Avani artisans refuse to let their geographic isolation stop them from using solar panels, rain water harvesting and naturally dyed, hand woven silk. Aid to Artisans works with these craftspeople on business and product development, and their items can be seen on their web site, <http://www.avani-kumaon.org/>.

Zebra-inspired pillows from Tanzania carry the history of Flotea Massawe, a successful female craft entrepreneur Aid to Artisans worked with who defied laws that prohibit most East African women from starting businesses. You can help support Flotea and hundreds of women artisans she now mentors simply by purchasing her products.

I urge you to visit our online store, <http://www.atawebstore.org/home.php>. The money that Aid to Artisans generates through our craft sales helps us to continue our work. It goes to supporting our programs and operations in more than a dozen current country projects worldwide. As an international nonprofit, we truly rely solely on funding from donors, from our web store, and from major organizations and foundations including the U.S. Agency for International Development and W.K. Kellogg.

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Handmade is the key to future environmental sustainability

Aid to Artisans is proud to report that even in struggling countries, it is possible to **achieve environmental and economic sustainability**.

In most developing countries, craft making is the second largest sector of the economy after agriculture, and it brings much needed hope to the environment as **handmade is often the most energy efficient** means of production.

“Hand skills are under appreciated, but this is the wave of the future. We will begin to see more and more people realize what can be produced with one’s hands,” said Clare Brett Smith, President Emerita of ATA.

ATA has been working “green” for years and helps to develop eco-friendly products and Earth-conscience processes. The recent booth at the New York International Gift Fair (Feb. 2008) featured “eco-chic” products such as: recycled leather bags and natural indigo tabletop furnishings from El Salvador, Tagua Jewelry (vegetable ivory) from Colombia, et al.

Today’s marketplace is more environmental and health conscious than ever before. With an increase in lead problems with exports from China, ATA was ahead of this curve and has been helping artisans around the world implement safe and healthy procedures to develop their crafts.

Examples:

Lead Free in Mexico

Background

ATA formed the Lead Free Alliance (2000-2005) to deal with problems facing traditional potters in Mexico, serious health problems of toxic lead glaze and kiln inefficiencies. ATA established a program that put the economic needs of the artisans first and simultaneously was able to convert them to lead-free glaze, which is safer for the environment and less toxic for the artisans. Kiln efficiencies yielded a 30% reduction in fuel use and improved quality overall and export sales reached over \$200,000 in 2006. Barro sin Plomo (BSP), a Mexico NGO, and its marketing arm, Echery Pottery, have assumed both the training and marketing functions.

Quick Facts

- Over 1,000 potters have converted to training in lead-free glaze application.
 - Pottery from the program is lead free and passes USFDA standards.
 - Export sales reached over \$200,000 in 2006.
 - ATA is looking to replicate this program globally in countries facing similar health risks, such as Morocco, Turkey and Uzbekistan.
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- In the Central Himalayan Mountains of India, Avani artisans impart environmental methods that many westernized countries have yet to initiate. A few examples of their eco-minded resourcefulness: They harvest rain water for drinking and cooking. They use solar photovoltaics for domestic lighting. They’ve figured out how to preserve their traditions while using blended natural fiber fabrics like wool and mulberry silk, and natural dyes for their shawls and carpets. They even find craft value in plant materials like onion skin. Their eco-minded businesses bring them fair wages, economic stability and conservation.

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- In South Africa, the Kunye artisans create handbags and pillows out of trash like plastic wrap and juice bottles.

You may be asking yourself, do consumers, in a sinking U.S. economy, really care about eco-friendly products?

A new survey released in the e-newsletter *Cleanzine*, says yes. “Despite a weakened U.S. economy, decision makers are better informed and more willing to spend green to go green,” the study reports. Fifty seven percent of those surveyed said they would pay the additional costs for products made from recycled materials.

ATA has already witnessed this movement first hand.

“Over the past year, buyers coming to the New York Gift Fair have been almost immediately asking, where are your environmentally-friendly products? This is a trend we’re going to see more of,” said Marilyn Hnatow, ATA’s Director of Marketing.

For the time in its 15-year history, ATA’s August, 2008 Market Readiness Program, which has trained hundreds of artisans from more than 45 countries in product development, will hold a green module. The goal: to educate artisans about what it means to be green and how to meet the high demand market expectations.

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Aid to Artisans Fosters Entrepreneurship and Sustainability

Unlike many other non-profits, Aid to Artisans has a demonstrated commitment to fighting poverty by empowering individuals and organizations to earn an income through their own skills and expertise. Through its proprietary Market Link initiative, ATA works with a network of partners, from designers to importers to high-end buyers, to promote entrepreneurship and sustainability. By focusing on market needs and equipping artisans with the latest business skills, ATA is able to visibly impact poverty and connect artisans from Afghanistan to South Africa to the global market.

Aid to Artisans Ghana

Background

According to a case study funded by the Ford Foundation, ATA has had a major impact on the Ghanaian export market. Ghana's exports increased from \$160,000 in 1989 to US \$11 million in 2002. Adu Mensah, the general manager of the Ghana Export Promotion Council attributed 60% of this increase to the efforts of ATAG and ATA. Numerous craft enterprises are now capable of filling orders of \$100,000 and more.

Quick Facts

- In 1993, a business development program was developed to aid the sustainability and traditions of local artisans.
- By 1997, ATAG grew into a self-sustaining enterprise that supports the growth of new artisans.
- Products produced by Ghana artisans have appeared in Pier 1 Imports, Marshall's and TJ Maxx since 1999.
- In 2002, ATAG accounted for 60% of the US\$11 million in exports from Ghana.

Peru

Background

Thanks to USAID funding, ATA conducted a project in Peru from 1994-2002 that resulted in substantial growth in craft exports, bigger businesses and more jobs in the craft sector.

In 1994, the Peruvian craft sector was troubled despite a strong and varied craft tradition. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, traditional products and styles from the Andes were fashionable in the US and Europe, so many craftsman never needed to learn to adapt and develop new product. But as global fashions shifted, the products did not.

From 1994 through 2002, ATA, through a partnership with the Peruvian Exporter's Association (ADEX), provided marketing, product development and technical production assistance to the sector. The project was called the Microenterprise and Small Producers Support Project (MSP).

Quick Facts

- By February 2001, ATA had helped achieve sales of more than \$18 million and created 14,470 new jobs.
- In 2003, craft exports reached US\$30 million (in contrast, exports were US\$16 million in 1994 and declining).
- Artisans reported wages from 51% to 305% of national per capita income. Program clients earned an average of 134% of national per capita income, whereas artisans who did not participate averaged 90%.

Aid to Artisans Is an Expert in International Commerce

With several international projects and people on the ground around the world, ATA has a unique opportunity to provide insight on many of today's global news items. DCI will work with ATA to identify the appropriate opportunities and offer media ATA spokespeople that can act as experts in a multitude of areas including, but not limited to:

- Sustainable Development
- Environment Issues in Development
- Product Innovation in the Craft Sector
- Ethical Sourcing
- Adult Learning Trends & Training
- Corporate Social Responsibility

Taking the lead out of Mexican Pottery



Rosario Lucas did the unthinkable.

She was the first woman in her community in Santa Fe De Laguna, Mexico to switch to lead free pottery glazes. Now, dozens of other women potters pass through home, so they can see for themselves how her life has changed.

When Rosario had a miscarriage and went to a nearby doctor, he told her it was because of lead. The doctor said he'd seen many children become critically ill, and even die, because their mothers had exposed them to their leaded pottery work as babies. This was about eight years ago, and thanks to switching to lead free pottery, Rosario and her husband now have two healthy daughters.

Rosario spends a great deal of her time teaching other women about how to protect themselves, how to separate their kitchen from their work space, and other ways to take necessary precautions. Another reason why Rosario is so important is the example she set. It is not easy, culturally, for women in her community to abandon traditions that have been in families for centuries. Many women are afraid and even willing to suffer in order to avoid what they see as violating their cultural heritage. They say, "My grandmother worked this way until she died, why should I change?" They are also afraid of what the men in their families will say. For example, many complain that if their kitchen becomes separate from the work space they will have to move into new homes. So, it's a huge deal to take ownership and go lead-free. Rosario is a source of inspiration....

As you may know, in 1994 there were an estimated 1.5 million potters in Mexico. When foreign markets, including the U.S., banned the use of lead products, that number crashed to about 50,000 pottery workshops representing 500,000 individuals. (These stats are from FONART, a local government agency that has spent nearly 10 years researching and testing unleaded glazes that work in traditional Mexican kilns.)

Given that the crafts market is the second largest economic engine in developing countries, this was a pointed blow to Mexico's economy. More importantly, right now the Mexican pottery industry faces a critical and deadly health situation, and time is running out. The artisans that continue to use lead in their kilns are slowly killing themselves, their families and the environment. (Please watch this YouTube video

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below featuring doctors specializing in lead toxicity, and artisans themselves, all of which will give you an eye-opening look at what lead is doing to these potters. http://mx.youtube.com/watch?v=nzEU7rH_14o)

In 2000, Barro Sin Plomo formed through the work of Aid to Artisans -- <http://www.aidtoartisans.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=5445>.

The results are profound:

- Over **1,000** potters have converted to training in lead-free glaze application, and learned improved kiln technology and processes to maintain a lead-free environment;
- Export sales reached over **\$200,000** in 2006 (Informal local sales from family workshops are substantial but not generally reported.)
- Kiln efficiencies yielded a **30%** reduction in fuel use and improved quality;
- Mexicans now direct and manage the lead-free program;
- Pottery from the program is lead free and passes USFDA standards.

Barro Sin Plomo pottery is being sold right now in California at Cisco Brothers in Pasadena, and other important buyers include The Gardener, Tail of the Yak in Berkeley, Aesthetx, and Bazaar del Mundo in San Diego.

The NGO hopes that someday, it can bring hope to artisans in other countries throughout the world who face serious health risks due to lead.

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A Story of Hope from an Aid to Artisans Small Grant

"We have never received any grant for group, current funding is nil, due to post election violence, we lost everything, and are starting over again. We have currently been receiving small donations for food, since the post election violence started, from Gifts of Life (Kim Tufts) in NH (USA). We have not been able to go back to work as we need tools, supplies, materials and a workshop," – The Fatine Self Help Group, Kenya.

Nearly every week of every year, Aid to Artisans hears cries for help from artisans around the world.

Our small grants program makes about 50 grants a year, ranging from \$500-\$1500, to craft-based associations across the globe that have been recommended by an organization know to ATA including Peace Corps, OXFAM, Fair Trade Federation or members of our trade network. Instead of providing our expertise in market or business training, we simply send these groups a check so that they can purchase much needed equipment and materials. **Since ATA initiated its grant program in 1981, we have awarded over 300 grants with an aggregate value exceeding \$300,000.**

Last spring, the Fatine Self Help Group in Kenya received their first grant from ATA for \$1,500, the maximum amount we provide. The group was promised what is called a "match donation," so that means our donation went twice as far for them.

The Fatine artisans produce custom made, beautiful soap stone carvings such as bowls and plates for local and export markets. They provide work for about 15 families, many widows suffering from HIV and AIDS. They search for the soap stone in mining holes, carefully removing the top layer of soil in order to reach the inner layers of soft stones for carvings. They are very careful not to waste any of the stones, and have attended seminars to learn how off-cuts can be salvaged to create small items like earrings, eggs and little animals.

Fatine artisans have done very well in their productions, well enough to earn two certificates of registration. Well enough to create beautifully packed shipments for a New Hampshire-based fair trade store called Gifts of Life. Well enough so that they were already searching for ways to really reach the global marketplace. **But then the unthinkable happened....**

Post election violence erupted in Kenya. Their shop was burned and looted. They lost their homes. They lost their tools, materials, and all of their personal possessions. Neighbors and family members were killed before their eyes. Many of them ran to nearby police shelters and churches for fear of their lives. If it weren't for Kim Tufts donations, owner of Gifts of Life, they would have had little food to eat.

"I have been doing business with Mr. Obara, the founder of Fatrine, and I know they take great pride in their work. I have never received broken goods in shipment, and they always worked in a very timely manner, many times faster than other groups I have dealt with in Africa...I am very impressed with their willingness to make new, different items to stand out from the usual items seen everywhere made in soapstone," Kim wrote in her May 13 Small Grant recommendation letter to Aid to Artisans.

Phil Smith, founder of an ATA Trade Network organization called "One World Projects," has been working with the Fatine Self Help Group since ATA awarded their grant.

In early October, he shared with ATA the following letter to let us know how the Fatine artisans are doing since they received their Small Grant.

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The Fatrine Self-Help Group, a group of 15 soapstone artisans in Kenya lost everything they had in the post-election violence in January. They lost their homes, their workshop, all their possessions, and some even their lives. They fled their community and as refugees they became separated from each other; scattered throughout the country. When the violence subsided the fear was so great that they did not want to return. Without the tools, materials, and workshop they also were without the ability to generate income for themselves and their families.

*Through the Aid to Artisans Small Grant, they found a new building for a workshop, purchased the raw materials they needed, and the equipment they needed to cut and carve the stones. The timing and ability of ATA to respond quickly was crucial as they had a large order from a customer in France. After receiving the grant in July, they worked night and day to complete the order and were able to ship the container to their customer in time. **Without the grant and assistance these 15 families, who had already suffered so much, they would certainly have been faced with uncertainty, pain, and suffering as they sought to rebuild their lives.***

Since shipping their first order, they are now working on another for a customer in Italy. I want to share some photos of the artisans of the Fatrine Self Help Group that were supported from your generous donation. I think one of the biggest pleasures we receive in life is knowing that in some small way we helped to improve the lives of those that are less advantaged than ourselves. Your donations are making a difference in this world and the lives of artisans. Thank you for your continued support.

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The Story of Flotea Massawe

A female artisan from Tanzania builds empowering international craft business

Behind Flotea Massawe's smile, there's a **business woman** who won't take *no* for an answer, a **mother** who inspired her four daughters to become entrepreneurs, a **mentor** who is showing other women that men are not the only bread winners in Tanzania.

Pregnant at 17, Flotea, like many women in East Africa, married and never attended secondary school. As years went by, she realized that her husband's \$50-a-month salary couldn't feed her four children and extended family, 10 people total. One day, she did the "unthinkable"—she asked her husband's permission to start earning her own income.

"At first, he was worried because he was the head of the household. But he realized it was hard depending on one person. He realized I could make life easier. He supported me then, and even today. It's not very common for husbands to support their wives and see that craft can be a business," Flotea, now 49, said.

In 1992, Flotea made tie-dyed embroidery that sold in local markets for \$0.05. She began cultivating relationships within her community in search of capital, a difficult goal for a Tanzanian woman. She asked her friends to teach her how to use kilns. At 25, she started earning just enough money for bus fare and more clothing.

"When I met Aid to Artisans in 2004, that's when somebody really changed my life," she said.

Flotea had the determination and talent to succeed in business, but she needed training: how to design the right product, how to understand the local and international market needs, how to build lasting relationships with buyers. Aid to Artisans provided these skills through product development, design and marketing training, and helped teach Flotea that she didn't need to sell tie-dyed garments for \$0.05. Instead, she formed her own textile and embroidery business that flourishes today, Marvelous Batiks. Before Flotea met Aid to Artisans, she was producing 200 pieces and earning about \$10. Now, Marvelous Batiks produces 2,000-3,000 pieces a month for buyers all over the world including those in India, the U.S. and Japan. Flotea is earning \$100,000 a year. For the first time, Macy's came to Tanzania to source from her store. About 40% of her business is export and next year, her dream is for 50% of her sales to be international.

With the money she earned, Flotea bought her first computer. Right now, her shop has three Desktops. "I'm a fast learner with the Internet, and I would memorize color schemes and sizes in my sleep. I wanted to learn everything I could," she said. Flotea was the first winner of a Women Entrepreneurs in Textile in Tanzania Award presented by the Ministry of Industry and Trade. Her mind is always working. She's aware of the importance of "eco" in the marketplace and may someday create products out of the plastic bags she sees floating around her streets. By spreading the word about the market potential in recycled products, she hopes to help improve the environment in Tanzania, while bringing income to her community.

Perhaps most importantly, Flotea sees major changes in her life. She opened up a bank account for the first time and started saving her own money.

"I don't come back to beg my husband so much. I came into freedom, which I never thought was there for women like me," she said.

Flotea's courage was contagious. All four of her daughters work at Marvelous Batiks and are women business leaders in their own right. One is starting a designer cake business, one is pursuing a college education in marketing, another works in the hotel industry. Flotea believes her achievements are really her community's achievements. She frequently holds meetings to bring other women together. She has already "convinced" universities to educate women about the income potential of craft. She hopes she can reach out to women in rural regions of Tanzania, where life is even harder because they suffer from "hopelessness."

Flotea will be attending Aid to Artisans' Market Readiness Program August 16-19 at the 2008 New York International Gift Fair in New York City. It will be a special occasion, because she will be

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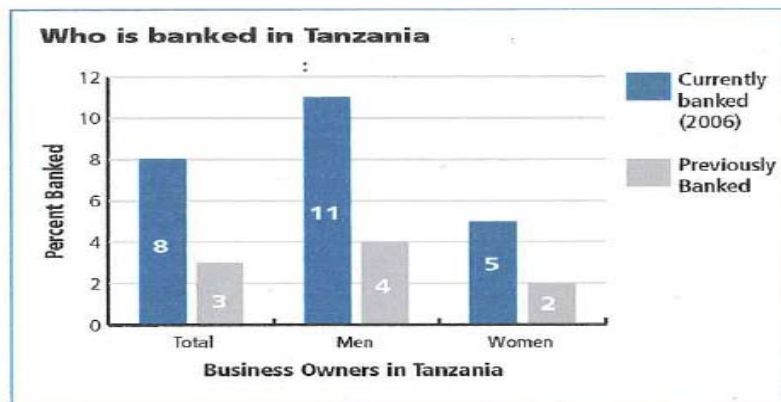
meeting artisans who are starting in the global marketplace just as she once was. She hopes to inspire them with her story.

“My daughters have seen my awards, my life. They have seen the changes that come from working hard. They look at me and say Mama, we really are blessed. And I tell them, you’re right, remember, nobody will come and help you unless you help yourself.”

Fact Sheet- Women Business Owners in Tanzania

- Tanzania is a country in East Africa with a population of 39.5 million people.
- In 2007, there was only one bank in Tanzania with a woman CEO, EXIM Bank.
- Discriminatory laws throughout East Africa deter women from securing business loans. Customary laws prevail and make it difficult for women to use land as collateral for these loans.
- Although laws may change, typically a husband's permission is required to open a bank account and for business registration.
- In Ghana, Cameroon, and Tanzania, women are resource poor with time and cash and have difficulty getting contracts enforced in cumbersome legal systems.
- On average, about 4% of women in Tanzania are in senior business positions.

Source: International Finance Corporation, “The Doing Business Project”



Source: Financial Sector Deepening Trust, Tanzania 2007.

- In Tanzania, women, especially rural women, provide 80% of the labor force and produce 60% of food production.
- About 60% of women in Tanzania live in absolute poverty.
- In secondary schools, girls account for less than 46% of the total enrollment.
- Though women are the main producers of cash crops, they still struggle with their rights to earn income and own their wealth.
- Skills associated with Tanzanian women tend to be undervalued and defined as unskilled, even when they entail complex actions and thought processes.
- The Tanzanian government, in collaboration with NGOs, has been working to redraft many discriminatory laws against women and establish a Commission on Human Rights.
- In the 2000 Tanzanian elections, women successfully voted.

Source: Tanzania National Website, <http://www.tanzania.go.tz/gender>

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El Salvador: From sweeping floors to the aisles of Whole Foods

Reina's story begins with a broom, a dust bag and a stiff uniform.

The single mother lived in a tiny house with a tin roof and no plumbing. She supported her 4 year old son, Alexis, and 10 other family members on a \$60 a month income cleaning houses and working in a nearby factory.

Her dream: that her earnings would give Alexis the chance to someday achieve more than her third grade education.

"I want to help my son – give him an education and opportunity – so he can have a better life than me," Reina said.

But in 2001, disaster struck the coffee region of Comasagua, El Salvador. The devastating earthquake and mudslides left hundreds of families like Reina's homeless and jobless. Rebuilding began quickly, but re-establishing crops would take time, so the community needed to resourcefully think about other ways to earn income.

Technoserve, Aid to Artisans and the Birth of Arte Comasagua

Ana Rosa Graf, an architect and designer from San Salvador, realized that local women stuck at home could make high quality collages made out of leaves, ferns, grasses and flowers. She found 12 women and slowly began selling these crafts to local souvenir chain stores, on average earning \$450 a month.

In 2005, Ana Rosa enrolled herself in a Technoserve Business Plan Competition. Technoserve, like **Aid to Artisans**, is an organization that is committed to building businesses in rural communities throughout the world.

Ana Rosa spent six months participating in Technoserve's practical training sessions, learning how to run a small enterprise, and how to market as well as export her products. She did so well that she won \$6,000 in seed capital, money she used to launch a new card making business she named **Arte Comasagua**.

In November of 2005, Arte Comasagua approached USAID's Artisan Development Program, executed by Aid to Artisans, with the hope of expanding her business.

Arte Comasagua's Next Step- Aid to Artisans

Arte Comasagua's next step for true profitability was to work with **Aid to Artisans**. Ana Rosa and her team had the talent, but they needed to learn how their collages could reach the global export market. **Aid to Artisans** hired two highly successful designers who called upon their sense of "contemporary funky flair." They added key product touches that they knew would interest large buyers.

But, it takes more than funky flair to succeed- it takes access to markets. It was at the **Aid to Artisans** booth at the August 2006 New York International Gift Fair when Arte Coagula truly took off.

Many major buyers stop by the **Aid to Artisans** booth because ATA's reputation gives buyers the confidence they need to place substantial orders. On this particular day, several Pottery Barn buyers walked over to see the Arte Comasagua flower lady cards. They loved them and ordered more than 5,000 pieces. From Pottery Barn, came Hope For Women, a fair wage Vermont-based importer that liked Arte Comasagua so much it is helping the group to double its size by 2009, and has already purchased more than 3,000 worth of monthly production of cards.

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In Whole Foods Markets, from the Rocky Mountain region to California, Arizona, Nevada, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Wisconsin, **Arte Comasagua cards now gleam from the aisles**. Hope For Women secured this vendor opportunity, and also now sells the greeting cards in over 600 stores in 48 states throughout the U.S. and Canada.

“We anticipate that the group will have the confidence to double in size by 2009, creating life-changing work for more women,” said Evan Goldsmith, President of Hope for Women. “I had the privilege of visiting El Salvador, meeting each of the women artisans and spending time with them and their families at their homes. They are an inspiring group.”

Arte Comasagua’s potential really became evident from this point on. Their products were promoted and sold in both local and regional markets, **resulting in a 280% increase in monthly sales**. Aid to Artisans designers worked with the women artisans to develop new products such as *thank you* cards for a hotel chain. Through Aid to Artisans, the women were able to not only enhance their products, but learn valuable skills in business communication and management. In February of 2006, additional orders from Hiper Paiz came through, a local hypermarket chain part of Wal-mart Latin America. Sales totaling \$5,350 were obtained from a month-long craft fair. **Just this one business link, has generated sales for the workshop equivalent to what they would normally make in almost one year.**

What happened to Reina?

Today, Reina is known as one of the newest and hardest working women in the whole Arte Comasagua group. **Though Reina is a relatively new artisan, she has already doubled her income.**

Thanks to Arte Comasagua, hope came knocking at her door for the first time in her life. When she joined Arte Comasagua, she quickly realized she could work from home and take care of her family while earning a fair wage. Reyna was able to buy herself new clothes, something she’d never done before. She found self-esteem for the first time and even spread hope throughout her community.

Before working with Arte Comasagua, Reina felt isolated and alone. She was very shy and reserved, but things began to change when she started creating cards. She now looks you right in the eye and speaks without any hesitation, Evan recalled of meeting her recently.

When asked what she likes most about her work, Reina told Evan, “It keeps me busy and I can focus on work and not the problems of life – it is liberating for me. It is not like working in an abusive factory where you constantly are getting yelled at and pushed to work faster. I like too that I can work either with the other women or from home where I can be with my son and family. I have more control of my life and my time.”

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Colombia- A story of true resourcefulness....

Ten years ago, in Bogota Colombia, an exporter named Javier Cardenas was browsing through a local market, breathing in the scents of fresh fruits and vegetables.

As he glanced over at the men and women vendors who were squeezing orange juice by hand, he wondered how they supported themselves and their families from their juice sales. He also watched as they tossed away orange peel after orange peel, and returned to squeezing pulp.

And suddenly... a light went off in his head. What if he could do something with those peels? What if by doing something with those peels, he could give back money to the orange peelers, and the artisans he worked with in Bogotá?

Javier spoke to his business partner. They brainstormed if it was possible to create a sellable product out of tossed away orange peels, and then they took it one step further-they made an orange peel rose, then an orange peel box. Javier started selling these products locally, but quickly realized he needed design training, connections to buyers, and costing and pricing information for the orange peel creations to truly succeed in the global marketplace.

Enter Aid to Artisans.

"In 2004, we went to a show in New York that was bad, we didn't sell anything. When we met ATA in 2005, ATA became our window to reach the American market. They worked with us on what American consumers were looking for, and they matched our products to price requirements. ATA brought buyers out to Colombia to look at our products and paid all expenses. World of Good, 10,000 Villages, met artisans in our communities and sourced our products. About 99% of the buyers started working with us right then, in 2005, and they are still working with us today, in 2008, thanks to ATA," said Javier.

Today, Javier has taken thousands of orange peels and turned them into dolls. He uses about three orange peels for each doll, which are featured as a best selling item on his website www.pielacida.com. He hires artisans to collect orange peels each day, so that they have enough material to work with. But these artisans don't simply take the peels- they buy them from the vendors. Javier says it's his way of doing what he can to help sustain the entire community.

In the 10 years that Javier has been working with orange peel crafts, his sales have increased over 100%. He started with 40 artisans on his staff, and today he has 140. 2008 has been his best year, he said, and he increased 70% of Pielacida's sales from 2007.

"Most of our clients are fair trade. The best thing is to watch how the results have changed the artisans' way of life. Many have their own homes. We loan money to people in our company if they need to buy a house. We try to teach our artisans money management. And we encourage them to study, to attend training, to strive to reach higher positions in our company," Javier said. "Here, we work eight hours a day, artisans have more than an hour of transportation, many kids, no husband, they have to come home to make food, hand wash clothes, it can be a very tough life. Every year that we accomplish sales, we try to give them helpful items for their lives, like washing machines."

He recalled the story of one artisan who never finished high school. She worked so hard that Javier put her in charge of purchasing orders, and she went from earning \$200 a month, to \$600 a month.

"In Colombia, you have 1-6 in your area of living, a scale based on safeness, neighborhood, electricity and public services. She was in a 2, and now she moved up," he said proudly.

Aid to Artisans

For more information, contact Joanna Smiley, Communications Manager, at 860-756-5550, ext. 418 or Joanna_Smiley@aidtoartisans.org

Did you know that in Colombia, craft businesses make a critical difference in the economy. According to a recent United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) study, the country has almost as many craftspeople working full-time as part-time. Colombian craft exports amount to \$40 million US dollars a year. Every year, 650,000 tourists bring an income of \$800 million US dollars to Colombia. Craft sales represent a major percentage in this income with 2000 shops, 400 gross and export trading companies, employing 800,000 people.

ATA Initiatives in the War-Ravaged Colombian Region of Choco

Aid to Artisans (ATA) has been working with artisan communities in Colombia since 2002, helping to bring more than more than US \$3.5 million in sales for rural artisans living in some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities in the country, 77% of which are women. But Bogota is not the only region ATA has undertaken.

Since 2007, ATA has been entrenched in projects in Chocó, Tolima, and Huila, some of the poorest and most dangerous regions of the country where a civil war has ravaged lives for over a decade leaving people displaced, hopeless and fearful that poverty will soon end their lives. It is important to note that this project is the first time that ATA works with an Internally Displaced Population (IDP). ATA had to budget for several additional initiatives including partnering with social workers in the region who could help teach staff how to work with a vulnerable group of people.

To help boost the incomes of artisans in this region, ATA hired a talented artisan from a past Colombian project named Orlando. He is now working with Javier to train 50 Choco region artisans in tagua nut production. Orlando taught these artisans how they could collect tagua nuts from the ground, color them in different shapes and sizes, and then successfully export them, so far to a major importer in the U.S. called Hope for Women that distributes crafts to Whole Foods and Pier 1 Imports.

With support from local partners, Choco artisans participate in capacity-building workshops, where they learn how to use, dye, and develop their raw materials. In the Chocó region, artisans work with wood, tagua (natural seed), damagua and iraca (natural fiber). In Tolima and Huila, artisans work with leather, pindo (natural fiber), sisal, tagua, horn, bone, gourds, seeds, mimbre (natural fiber) among others. These raw materials are natural and their extraction are completely environmentally friendly.

ATA has also helped these Choco artisans to participate in local, regional, and international fairs for income generation. For instance, Expoartesanas, held once a year in Bogotá, is one of the biggest fairs in Latin America in which these artisans generate sales. It was the artisans' first time participating in the fair and they generated more than \$48,000 in sales for Chocó. Tolima and Huila artisans generated more than \$95,000 in sales.

ATA also brought four Choco artisans to the New York International Gift Fair to participate in a market mentoring program that has helped them to sell products in the international market, including sales to Global Goods, Charity USA and Ethic Art. Though challenging, ATA is hopeful that it can continue changing lives of displaced artisans living in this volatile region.

Aid to Artisans

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